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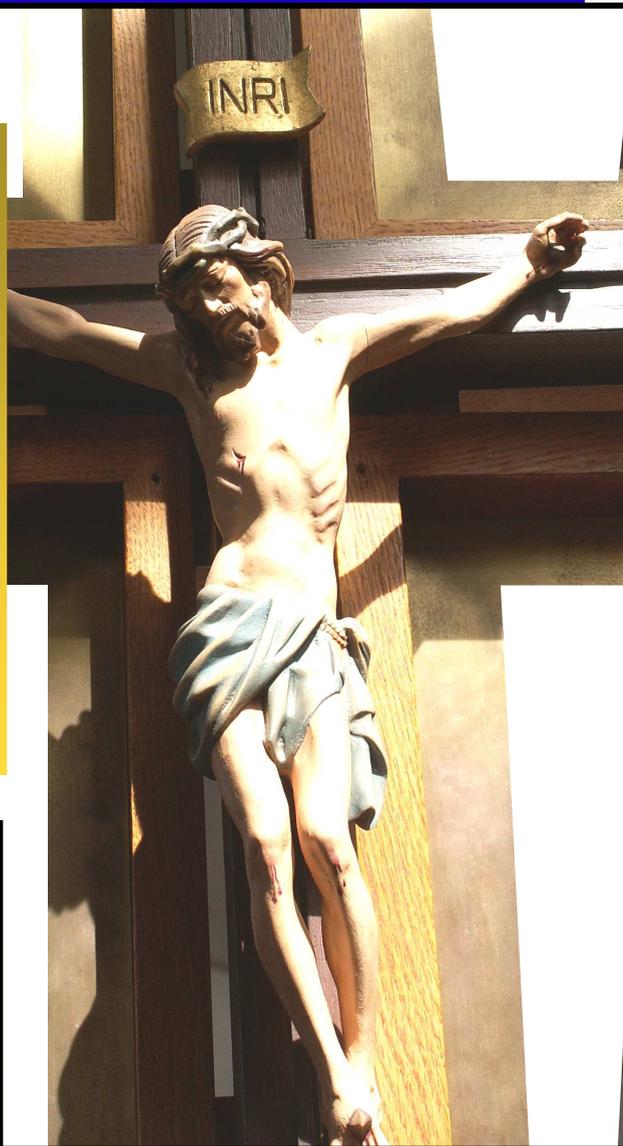
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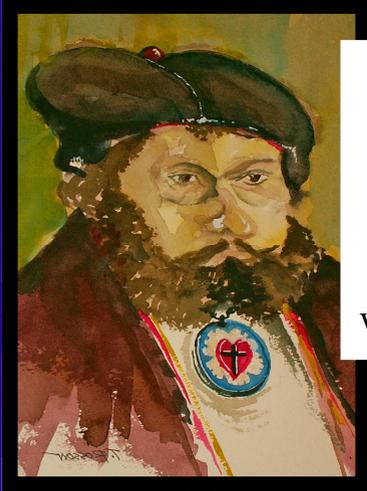
And much more...



STEADFAST QUARTERLY

The Journal of the Brothers of John the Steadfast

Vol. 1, No. 3, December 25, 2008



JOHN THE STEADFAST

The Brothers of John the Steadfast is a Lutheran men's group that promotes the Lutheran Confessions, supports new Lutheran media, upholds the office of the ministry and trains men to be effective heads of their household.

www.steadfastlutherans.org

STEADFAST QUARTERLY

Vol. 1, No. 3

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

1 Corinthians 15: 58

The Quarterly Journal of the Brothers of John the Steadfast

The Brothers of John the Steadfast, brings together Lutheran laymen to defend and promote the orthodox Christian faith which is taught in the Lutheran Confessions, provide financial support for Christian new media (e.g. Issues, Etc.), and to support other endeavors selected by its membership that defend and promote the cause of confessional Lutheranism.



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and CLERGY standing “steadfast”
together for over five centuries!

Featured Steadfast Parish

Messiah Lutheran-Seattle

By Elaine Gavin

Almost 21 years ago, Pastor Ernie Lassman arrived at Messiah Lutheran Church in Seattle, where there was a vocal minority in leadership that was receptive to Semine theology with its openness to the ordination of women and open communion. Today, Pr. Lassman is blessed with a congregation in which many of the challenges have disappeared, having moved from a congregation that was unfocused in its confessionalism to a parish steadfast in its focus on justification by grace through faith as given through the means of grace.



The sanctuary at Messiah
(with Thanksgiving food collection)

Messiah Lutheran Church was established 60 years ago in what was then outside the city limits of Seattle. Messiah's neighborhood has gone through the normal cycles of young families, to few families, to families returning to the neighborhood once again. One key aspect has been the incredible increase in the cost of housing in the area, which makes it difficult for younger families to move there. However, families are starting to come back--perhaps thanks to Microsoft?

Pastor Lassman describes his journey to Messiah Lutheran Church:

I was born and raised in the Midwest to a Lutheran family. I thought about being a pastor when I was in elementary school, and for a variety of reasons put it out of my mind as I approached junior high and high school. At the end of my junior year of high school my family moved to Seattle, Washington, where I attended the University of Washington for two years. I met my wife and we



were married in 1968. After serving in the military I returned and completed my B.A. in Reformation History at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. When I was in the military the thoughts about being a pastor came back after seriously reading the scriptures and books by Martin Luther. As the years went by, my conviction became stronger. I realized I didn't think I could be happy doing anything other than telling other people the gospel of Jesus Christ. I graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1978 with a Master of Divinity in New Testament Studies, and completed an STM in New Testament Studies in 1992. My wife and I have two grown sons. Messiah is my third parish, the first two being in British Columbia, Canada.



Messiah's font

One of Messiah's members, Harry Edmon, is treasurer of the congregation, an usher captain, a choir member and substitute adult Bible class teacher when Pastor is on vacation. Here is what he had to say about Messiah, Pastor Lassman, and the tools he has for remaining steadfast and firm in the faith:



You don't need a coffee shop in the church with Starbucks across the street

This is the best run congregation I have belonged to. Pastor and people know their roles and work together in harmony. There are no doctrinal disputes. The congregation always steps up when a need arises. Pastor Lassman is the best teacher of laypeople I have ever been associated with. He is able to take complex theological concepts and make them understandable to all. His sermons are fine examples of traditional law/gospel Lutheran

preaching. The gospel always shines forth in all his preaching and teaching.

Messiah also provides important service to the LCMS with its vicarage program. This year's vicar, Matthew Zickler, is the sixth man to serve at Messiah. The vicars benefit from the experience of serving in a steadfast parish, and the parish benefits as well. Harry Edmon has very much enjoyed the presence of the vicars in the congregation and, when asked why Holy Communion is important to him, answered, "Our first vicar (Donald Peterson) really hit it on the head in his Maundy Thursday sermon: Here is Christ, not only spiritually, but in a way I can touch and taste."



Pastor Lessman, Vicar Zickler and Brother of John the Steadfast Jim Pierce



Messiah's Communion Vessels

The members of this steadfast parish serve each other, building each other up in the faith. As Harry points out, the greatest threats to remaining steadfast and firm in the faith are "sinful flesh and the constant messages from the world which are contrary to the Gospel." Among the weapons to fight these threats are faithful attendance at worship, Bible reading and study, and the other members of Messiah. Harry says,

I look up to Vic and Delores Cohrs, a couple of our older members. Vic, for his steadfast participation in the congregation despite a debilitating spinal condition, and Delores, a charter member of the congregation who is always positive and supportive of the pastor and the lay leadership. I also look up to Fred Holtz,



who was our head elder for years and now has terminal cancer, yet still maintains a positive attitude.

What do steadfast pastors and their parishioners enjoy reading? What are their favorite books of the Bible? Harry Edmon says, “My favorite books of the Bible outside the Gospels are Job and Ecclesiastes. I enjoyed reading *Christless Christianity* by Michael Horton. I also like C.S. Lewis' writings, especially *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*.” It was difficult for Pastor Lassman to choose one book of the Bible, but he settled on Romans. He reads all the time, particularly things related to theology, history, philosophy, culture and civilization.

Pastor Lassman’s greatest joy is “seeing people who truly understand and appreciate confessional Lutheran theology. The greatest frustration is wishing that even more members of our congregation understood and appreciated our confessional theology.” He also shared his favorite Bible verse, one from which we can take blessed comfort in these last days: “In this world you will have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)



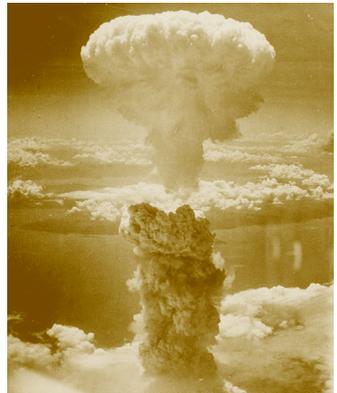
A beautiful morning view of the Cascade Mountains looking to the east from the narthex.

Signs of the Times

By James D. Lowitzer

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." - John 5:25-29 (ESV)

When I was going through confirmation instruction in the late 1950's, the talk I heard about the end of the world had to do with nuclear annihilation. Over the years, I had been instructed in school in how to protect myself from a nuclear attack by sitting under my school desk and covering my head with my hands. If there was enough time, we would assemble in the hallway, sit against the wall and, again, cover our heads with our hands. It's likely that some of you learned the same survival tricks. At the time it didn't occur to me that this was a ridiculous exercise in futility. We were naïve enough to believe that our desks could save us from falling debris and that the walls of the school were strong enough to stand up even if the rest of the building collapsed.



I also remember the signs posted here and there along the highways pointing to evacuation routes. There were other signs posted on buildings that announced that there were nuclear fallout protections available inside. Where I lived, every Saturday the sirens would go off and there would be a loud voice filling the whole town with the announcement that this was a test of the Civil Defense system. If you were watching television at that time, a slide would come on telling you that this also was a test of the Emergency



Broadcast System. Some of those tests are still going on over the television and radio and even the outdoor public systems.

Many of us also had large stocks of canned goods and bags of rice in our basements hoarded against the coming nightmare of nuclear war. This was all about preparation and survival. There was even a sort of warning provided by some scientists who manipulated the Doomsday Clock, so that we could know how close we were to the peril of nuclear war. It was started in 1947 at seven minutes to midnight. In 2007 it was set at two minutes to midnight reflecting North Korea's test of a nuclear weapon, Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions, and the more fashionable climate change issue.

In light of 2 Peter 3:12 perhaps we should be concerned about global warming! Of course, Peter is talking about the world being consumed by fire, and I don't think that's what Al Gore and his adherents envision.

I suppose, therefore, that it's natural for us to look for signs, clues, portents, or sightings of things to come. I suppose it's also natural for us to try to protect and prepare ourselves for coming catastrophic events. It seems that men have had these inclinations for a long, long time. We are by nature anxious.

As I write this, the Gospel lesson for next Sunday is Matthew 25:1-13 in the *LSB* 3-year lectionary. This is part of the long discourse Jesus gave privately to his disciples on the Mount of Olives just two days before he was "delivered up to be crucified." It is part of his response to the disciples' question, ". . . when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"

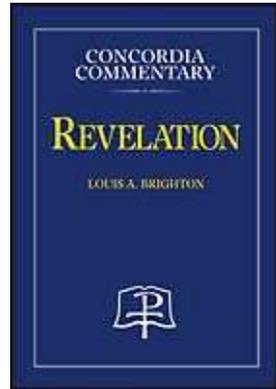
That question has been on the minds of people from the times of the prophets, and it continues so today. The portion of Jesus' answer in Matt. 24:36 should, I think, end the discussion: "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." But that doesn't seem to have stopped so many from picking dates. It hasn't stopped them from searching through the Bible for clues nor trying to tie different threads together in order to come up with some

scheme to predict the end of the world or “reveal” something about what will be happening.

So much time is spent on attempting to read the signs, as many attempt to turn the headlines in the newspaper into prophetic fulfillment of what they read in the Scripture. They are searching for ways to protect themselves, to be included in those “taken up” rather than those “left behind.”

But one's understanding of the end times really all comes down to Biblical interpretation and how you do it. Dr. Brighton in his Concordia Commentary on Revelation sums it up quite nicely (539-40):

Of first importance is the centrality of God's grace in Christ. Above all, every interpretation of Scripture must be in harmony with the central teaching of all Scripture, which is God's plan of redemption by grace alone and through faith in Christ alone. . . . A related consideration is the nature of the Kingdom of God established by Christ and the full effect of Adam's sin (cf. Rom 5:12-21). Fallen human beings are inherently corrupt and depraved (cf. Rom 1:18-32; 2:9-24), and the present world likewise is characterized by futility and corruption. Therefore all hopes for a visible kingdom of God similar to kingdoms of this world, to be established among fallen human beings on this present earth, are misguided.



With literally hundreds of books written about the end times and the discussion ongoing from the time of the Early Church Fathers (see Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*) until now (see Mel Odom, *Apocalypse Unleashed*, Tynedale: October 2008), how can anyone, particularly one without the education, skills, or time, be expected to sort through what the Bible really says?

Praise be to God that we have been given the Confessions which tell us all we really need to know. In the Apostle's Creed we confess that we believe “in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Luther, in his *Small Catechism* explanation says, “On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead,



and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.” That’s a simple statement of faith that I can grasp.

In the *Augsburg Confession*, there is a fuller statement in order to take on the millennial views of the day. The following is taken from *A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*, Concordia Publishing House. I believe the inclusion of the prefatory note is useful.

ARTICLE XVII

Christ’s Return for Judgment

Note: This article affirms the biblical view of the end times. It pointedly rejects any speculation or opinion about believers ruling the world before the final resurrection of the dead. It also rejects all theories about a “millennial” earthly rule of Christ as contrary to God’s Word.

¹ Our churches teach that at the end of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will raise all the dead [1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:2]. ² He will give the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, ³ but He will condemn ungodly people and the devils to be tormented without end [Matthew 25:31–46].

⁴ Our churches condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils.

⁵ Our churches also condemn those who are spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed.

There has certainly been controversy over this in the Lutheran Church.

KEY QUOTE

This article affirms the biblical view of the end times. It pointedly rejects any speculation or opinion about believers ruling the world before the final resurrection of the dead.

Time doesn't allow a full discussion of the expulsion of Rev. Schieferdecker over his view of millenarianism and his later recanting of it and again becoming a member of the LCMS, but a secular source reporting the event is of some note. *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1867*, noting the formation of the General Council observed,

Among those belonging to this new organization of Lutherans, there is some difference of opinion on the subject of Millenarianism. The Lutheran Synod of Missouri has expelled the Rev. Mr. Schieferdecker, one of their oldest ministers, on the ground of his having become entangled in the web of Millenarianism, which is condemned by the seventeenth article of the Augsburg Confession, and the Smaller Catechism. The Pennsylvania Synod, on the other hand, the first which last year withdrew from the old General Synod, has tolerated the honored prominent Millenarians in its connection, the Board of its Seminary electing one of them its president. (467)

I find two things interesting here. First, that this generally secular record of events would make note of this event at all and, second, that they have the *Augsburg Confession* and Luther's *Small Catechism* as central to the argument.

When the LCMS found it necessary to restate what it believed in *The Brief Statement of 1932*, it stated,

With the Augsburg Confession (Art. XVII) we reject every type of millennialism, or Chiliasm, the opinions that Christ will return visibly to this earth a thousand years before the end of the world and establish a dominion of the Church over the world; or that before the end of the world the Church is to enjoy a season of special prosperity; or that before a general resurrection on Judgment Day a number of departed Christians or martyrs are to be raised again to reign in glory in this world; or that before the end of the world a universal conversion of the Jewish nation (of Israel according to the flesh) will take place.

12 *Over against this, Scripture clearly teaches, and we teach accordingly, that the kingdom of Christ on earth will remain under the*



cross until the end of the world, Acts 14:22; John 16:33; 18:36; Luke 9:23; 14:27; 17:20-37; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 12:28; Luke 18:8; that the second visible coming of the Lord will be His final advent, His coming to judge the quick and the dead, Matt. 24:29, 30; 25:31; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 9:26-28; that there will be but one resurrection of the dead, John 5:28; 6:39, 40; that the time of the Last Day is, and will remain, unknown, Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:32-37; Acts 1:7, which would not be the case if the Last Day were to come a thousand years after the beginning of a millennium; and that there will be no general conversion, a conversion en masse, of the Jewish nation, Rom. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:14; Rom. 11:25; 1 Thess. 2:16.

According to these clear passages of Scripture we reject the whole of Millennialism, since it not only contradicts Scripture, but also engenders a false conception of the kingdom of Christ, turns the hope of Christians upon earthly goals, 1 Cor. 15:19; Col. 3:2, and leads them to look upon the Bible as an obscure book.

KEY QUOTE

We will try almost anything to ease our anxiousness. We want to be in control; we want to know the answers. We much prefer a complicated and secret scheme to a simple and straightforward answer.

The CTCR (Commission on Theology and Church Relations) of the LCMS provided an excellent review of various positions with Biblical reference in support or refutation in *The "End Times": A*

Study on Eschatology and Millennialism (September 1989). A very readable explanation was provided by Dr. Barry in *What About the New Millennium?* (available at www.LCMS.org). Both of these are commended to

clergy and laity alike for a solid grounding in preparation for discussions with congregational members, friends, family, or anyone looking for the Biblical view of the end times.

We will try almost anything to ease our anxiousness. We want to be in control; we want to know the answers. We much prefer a complicated and secret scheme to a simple and straightforward answer. And so, as with so many things, when we think about the end times we'd like to build something complicated out of intensely scrutinized and sometimes mysterious passages from Scripture rather than accept the simple answer of God's grace for us. When the end comes, it will be just that, the end. The end, that is, of this world and the beginning of the next. The new heaven and the new earth and God himself will wipe away every tear, and death shall be no more for the former things have passed away. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

James D. Lowitzer



The Messiah?

A Cartoon by Pr. Scott Blazek



You're checking the wrong source!
THIS is most certainly true!

Wait a minute! Is **THIS** the "Second Coming" and the beginning of a 1000 year Eutopia? *OR* is this the start of the little season? Let me check. I'm confused; is this the "second chance" or 2nd "change"?

Are the Lutheran Confessions a True Reflection of God's Word?

By Layman Neil Spooner

How and where do I begin? My pastor asked me to write this article. It is an honor but also a daunting task. If a Lutheran believes that doctrine should be based upon scripture alone, then the question is, Are the documents in the *Book of Concord* a direct reflection of scripture and nothing more?

In my experience as a confessional Lutheran layman, I have found that there are many Lutherans who are not familiar with the Lutheran Confessions and may have never read the *Book of Concord* in which they are found. These documents, except for the ecumenical creeds, were written by various ordained Lutheran theologians, including Martin Luther, and by at least one layman, Philip Melancthon. They were written in the 16th century in defense of the faith the reformers found in Scripture that was being contradicted by the Roman Catholic Church.

To thoroughly illustrate their truthfulness to Scripture would require a close examination of every document within the *Book of Concord*. I trust my pastor's assurance that the *Book of Concord* is the purest Confession of Law and Gospel ever written. But there is nothing like experiencing that realization for oneself. So I invite you to join me for some close study of several examples from the *Book of Concord*. I hope this exercise will encourage you to read and do your own investigating of the Lutheran Confessions to see that they are indeed a true and direct reflection of the scriptures.

To begin with, consider the preface to the *Book of Concord*, which states,

Thereupon a short confession was compiled out of the divine, prophetic, and apostolic Scriptures.'

. . . [the Book of Concord] is based solidly on divine Scriptures and that is also briefly summarized in the approved ancient symbols, recognizing the doctrine as the ancient consensus which the universal and orthodox



church of Christ has believed, fought for against many heresies and errors, and repeatedly affirmed.

It is clear that the intent on the authors was to base the Confessions on Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura) and to steadfastly commit themselves to it.

Next, we take a look at the *Augsburg Confession of 1530*, the first Confession in the *Book of Concord*. Again a clear statement is made in the preface of the document that it is based upon Holy Scripture:

. . . we offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teaching and of our own faith, setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated, and embraced in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories.'

Throughout the Confession, reference to Scripture in support of the teaching is consistently given. An example can be found in Section IV of the Confession concerning justification:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.'

So, is the Confession concerning justification based solely upon the truth of God's word? Let's examine the referenced Scripture passages:

Romans 3:21-26: But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is

in Jesus Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 4:5: And to the one who does not work but trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

We have space for one more example. Let's examine the *Formula of Concord*, the last Confession in the *Book of Concord*. The beginning states,

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Another passage from the *Formula of Concord*, Article I, Original Sin:

We condemn and reject these and similar false doctrines because God's Word teaches that man's corrupted nature can of and by itself do no good thing in spiritual, divine matters, not even the least thing (such as, for example, producing a good thought). Worse than that, in the sight of God it can by and of itself do nothing but sin (Gen. 6:5; 8:21).

Again, we examine the referenced Scripture passages to see if the teaching above is based on the truth of God's Word:

Genesis 6:5: The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 8:21: And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done."

These examples show that the Confessions are a true compiling of what the Bible teaches, collected into different documents to steadfastly confess, defend,



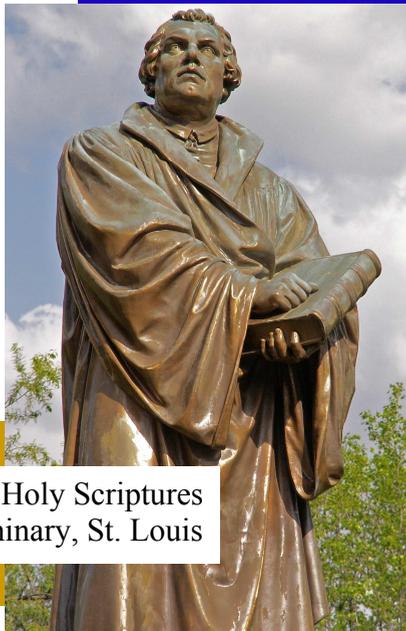
and instruct against the false doctrines that had arisen at the time. Why then do we need the Confessions today, five hundred years later? After all, the Confessions were a great document expressing the faith in Reformation times, but we are in the 21st century. Can they really apply to us today?

The answer is yes. The Confessions are a statement to the world of what we believe to be the truth of God's Word, found in the Bible. God's Word is everlasting and true, applying at all times. With the proliferation of denominations, i.e. the different ways people understand the Bible, it is all the more important for us to lay down our mark about the truth of what the Bible teaches, and then defend it with the Bible itself. The documents within the the *Book of Concord* do just this. What a blessing we have in the Lutheran Confessions!

Note:

All references to documents contained in the Book of Concord above (shown in italics) are from the Tappert edition of 1959.

All Bible verse references listed above are from the English Standard Version (ESV).



Luther and the Holy Scriptures
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Church Newswatch

What's Going On in the Church at Large?

By Jennifer Jordan

The **National Cathedral** has announced wide-ranging budgetary cuts. Following the cut of 33 staff members back in May, the Cathedral announced in November that it will let 94 staff people go and will out-source the operation of the cathedral's Museum Store to an outside vendor.

The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's** 2009 Youth Gathering will be held in New Orleans. One of the six different "Interest Areas" that youth can choose to register for is "The Environment: Going Green!" From the description,

"Environmental projects include learning about the water levies and flooding, visiting the marina or wetlands, learning about the impact of waste, planting trees, gardening, grass-mowing, or other related work. You will go home with a new awareness of your environment and encouragement to advocate for caring for the earth--a gift and blessing from God for all living things."

Yet another Bible translation. A group of "writers, poets, scholars, pastors, and storytellers" has been working on a fresh interpretation of the Bible. Called *The Voice*, it is being touted as "a Scripture project to rediscover the story of the Bible." The New Testament has recently been released, with the Old Testament yet to come. Chris Rosebrough, founder of Pirate Christian Radio, has written and spoken quite a bit about this postmodern "translation," but to give our readers a flavor for how it reads, here is John 1:1-5 as it appears in *The Voice*.

Before time itself was measured, the Voice was speaking. The Voice was and is God. This celestial Voice remained ever present with the Creator; His speech shaped the entire cosmos. Immersed in the



practice of creating, all things that exist were birthed in Him. His breath filled all things with a living, breathing light. Light that thrives in the depths of darkness, blazing through murky bottoms. It cannot, and will not, be quenched.

We'd politely suggest that “murky bottoms” is a rather ironic turn of phrase in this particular situation.

The **Anglican Church of North America** is a reality as of December 3, 2008. It consists of 700 conservative and orthodox Anglican (and formerly Episcopalian) congregations totaling around 100,000 people in average Sunday attendance. The preamble to the provisional constitution states that ACNA is “grieved by the current state of brokenness within the Anglican Communion prompted by those who have embraced erroneous teaching and who have rejected a repeated call to repentance.” The members of this new province of Anglicanism have much to work out amongst themselves; some congregations are Anglo-Catholic in their heritage, others are quite charismatic. The new province may be slightly more congregational in nature than the Episcopal church is; member churches will be allowed more freedom to leave. Congregations will also hold clear ownership of their physical property. Criticism from members of The Episcopal Church has been quite harsh. One critic, blogger Andrew Garns (<<http://andrewplus.blogspot.com>>), has derisively called ACNA “The Episcopal Church-Missouri Synod” in reference to the new province's conservative view of Biblical authority. An epithet they can be proud of, we'd say.



Canterbury Cathedral, home of the historic Anglican Church

Not Your Grandfathers' Church

Visits to Not-So-Steadfast Churches

By Phillip Magness

During my travels this past year I participated in worship in Texas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Ohio, and several places in Illinois. I sought out parishes that offered different “styles” of worship so that I could see what things were valued as essential by a parish and what things were considered “ad-aphora” (essentially indifferent to the Gospel and therefore optional). While one cannot fully ascertain a congregation's position on everything from just one Sunday experience, the liturgy does give a significant and profound confession of what a congregation believes. Conversations with congregational members at these locations reinforced my belief that the conclusions I drew from worshipping with these fellow Lutherans were indeed correct: how they pray does confess what they believe.

This quarter's article is about a moderately large exurban church. This parish was recommended to me as a place where there was “excellence” in three current styles of worship: traditional, blended, and contemporary. I eventually plan on writing about the various “traditional” and “contemporary” services I observed, but for now I want to focus on the “blended” service. This “style” is probably the most difficult to pin down of the three, as it varies the most from parish to parish. I have defined the traditional service as “the tradition that preserves the customs that were followed by a particular parish before they embarked on offering alternative services.” Similarly, the contemporary service can be explained as “what the new associate pastor and/or church consultants brought in after convincing the congregation that a new way of worship was needed for the sake of church growth.” But the “blended” service can be pretty much anything the locals make up as they go along, and so they are like Forrest Gump's box of chocolates: one never knows what to expect!

This blended service began as the pastor came out in a golf shirt and made a series of announcements about “mission and ministry opportunities.” He then sat down and let the band take over. As is typical in contemporary services, the



band leader introduced the songs and functioned as an assisting minister. The people were supposed to sing along with the band, but few did on the verses of the first song. They were in a solo vocal style with a range and syncopation that did not invite communal singing. The second piece was a nice Celtic melody which was sung well by everyone. I found out later it was a staple at this church and so it is sort of a liturgy for them. This often happens in Protestant churches: losing an understanding of the liturgy as the singing and praying of God's Word, they pick favorite melodies and repeat them for the sake of the experience of singing favorite songs together rather than for the experience of magnifying God's Word in song. This song led into a time of prayer, after which people were seated for the readings of the day.

The front-loading of the prayers in this service was illustrative of a theological emphasis on sanctification that came through loud and clear in the sermon, in which sanctification did not flow from our justification (i.e. the Gospel), but rather was a 'purpose-driven' exhortation to follow the "life lessons" offered to the hearers in God's Word. Similarly, the prayers of the faithful to live according to God's love were not offered after the reading and preaching of God's Word (as is done in the Divine Service and in the daily offices), but came before the reading and preaching. This seems to be a natural order of service for Third Use of the Law orientation: rather than hearing the Gospel and then asking the Lord to grant us His good and gracious will according to the mercy He gives us through the forgiveness of sins, this order of service gathers people into the Lord's presence where they then ask for His guidance and blessing and receive instruction on how they are to get their needs met. This is a big burden to place upon the people. No wonder they need to pray first!

One thing that did follow the sermon (entitled "Life Lesson") was a confession of faith. However, they did not confess one of the three ecumenical creeds (Apostles', Nicene, or Athanasian) as we bind ourselves to do in the Lutheran Confessions but instead had their own. To get around this obvious affront to confessional sensibilities, they took the postmodern approach of redefining what they were doing by simply calling the newfangled creed an "affirmation of faith." I could tell from the zealous way in

which the lady behind me was confessing this creed that this particular set of words was a habit for this congregation. At this I was greatly distressed, not just at the breach of fellowship with their fellow Lutherans, but also at the tone of the worshipers around me: this was THEIR creed. They were “with it”-- apparently not like those Christians who cling to those boring, old-fashioned creeds. This was when I knew that I simply could not commune at this church, even though it was in my own synod.

As the service continued, my sadness turned to nausea. As is common in contemporary churches, “Confession & Absolution” took place as a prelude to the Lord’s Supper. There is nothing inherently wrong in this; Walther had this custom. But the confession did not confess anything more than “falling short of the mark” in our desires to have “better relationships.” And the absolution was not an objective declaration of forgiveness but merely an affirmation of God’s goodness. Then, before communion, worshipers were told: “If you are guests here this morning, we simply ask that you take a look at your own life. If you are repentant and desire this blessing of the Lord here today, we invite you to join with us for communion.”

So there it was. Heterodox creed and open communion in a one-two punch. I became literally sick to my stomach with remorse over the spectacle of all this happening in a Missouri Synod church. These aren’t mere customs here, but actual bad practices. Say what you want about a screen, banter between band leader & pastor, informal attire, mood music during the prayers, contemporary music, and even the jumbled order of service. There are ranges of opinion on such things as to how desirable or undesirable they are. But about the practices of the church we have objective confessional standards, and these were being broken at every turn.

This is not the only place where this is happening. And, yes, I have brought this to the attention of the appropriate District President (DP). Perhaps in this case the DP will convince this parish of the wrongness of what they are doing and the need to return to a more Lutheran piety. Let us all pray this be so!

So why bring this to the church-at-large if the DP is aware of this? Because laymen need to hear the testimony of what is really happening in our churches. Most of us worship in our own congregations or in the congregations of family members who attend churches similar to ours. It is easy therefore to dismiss concerns about others’ worship practices as conservative over-reaction to a guitar or an unfamiliar setting of the liturgy. Certainly some confessional Lu-



therans are repristinators at heart, and so their complaints aren't taken very seriously by average churchgoers who simply don't share their passion for the culture of 1950's Wisconsin or 1580's Wittenberg. But these articles are written so that you may know indeed that today's LCMS is not your grandfathers' church, and that it is going to take the work of some truly courageous leaders to restore unity to our communion. Whether these things are going on in your church or not, you, the laymen of the evangelical Lutheran Church, can provide the leadership we need. "Ecclesiastical Supervision" is everyone's responsibility! We need change from above and from below--and lay leadership is key.

Certainly nobody can put a stop to a congregation doing whatever it wants to do. But we can appeal to their consciences to return to the fold. And, if they refuse, we can and should stop them from hanging the LCMS sign outside their door. We did not create this conflict, but our decision as to whether we will confront it or avoid it will determine whether or not this synod prevails. Think about it: how long would Subway last if they allowed hundreds of their stores to stop selling sandwiches and offered only pastries instead?

Quote of the Quarter from a Steadfast Layman On the Brothers Website

Is it "ministry" or "service?" (This comment was posted on a BJS article describing dogs "in ministry." We commend Robert for getting it right.

My wife has a Leader Dog service dog. The first time she communes at a congregation no one is singing when they approach the Lord's Table. Her dog very reverently will place his head on the kneeler until the dismissal. He is a service dog not a ministry dog.

Comment by Robert Eickmann — January 13, 2009

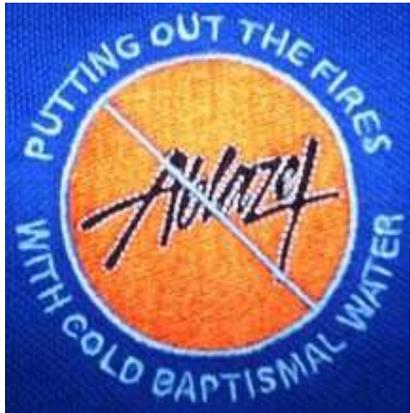
Featured Steadfast Blog

Putting Out the Fire

By Jennifer Jordan

Putting Out the Fire Of Ablaze! <<http://puttingoutthefire.blogspot.com>>

Frank Gillespie got himself in a little trouble when he started poking fun at our synod's Ablaze! evangelism "movement" on his blog. As often happens in the open forum of the Internet, he was challenged by a commenter to defend what he was saying. He wrote up a seven-part series on the theological problems with the Ablaze! Movement, earning himself the title of "Ablaze! Firefighter." He wears the title with good humor. Frank, a convert to Lutheranism, told us,



"After 15 years of declaring myself an atheist and looking inward for some sense of purpose through my own good works, I was literally brought to the point of despair in that I realized that I couldn't do it all or fix every problem that happened to come up. Once I hit that point I had nowhere to turn but to Christ."

Living in the "Haut South" (actually, he admits he's a southern transplant) Frank has ample opportunity to contend for the faith, both online and in his daily life. From explaining to southern born-and-bred neighbors that liturgical worship isn't "worshiping the liturgy" to teaching the Augsburg Confession to his congregation's teens to blow-by-blow "slack-jawed layman" analysis of the synod's latest attempts to be clever and hip, we're glad to have Fireman Frank on the job.



Steadfast Dads Talk Theology With Their Kids

By Jennifer Jordan

Our featured blogger this month, Frank Gillespie, is not a father himself. He's no stranger to the world of teenagers, though, as he spends Sunday School hour each week with his congregation's high school class. We turned to him for some advice on teaching the faith to teens. Too often adults assume that deep theological questions are either too tough for adolescents or that they won't be interested in such esoteric stuff. We sell our youth short with this attitude. As Frank told us,

"I'm amazed how many adults understand and expect that a teen can learn a second or third language as well as complex scientific disciplines such as calculus or physics but are afraid to tackle the doctrine of the Trinity or the understanding that Jesus can be found on every page of Scripture and not just in the four Gospels with teenagers."

When Frank began teaching teen Sunday School, he dove right into the Augsburg Confession with his class. We admire his steadfast courage!

Your teen's post-confirmation years are the years that, more than any others, will determine whether or not your son or daughter seeks out a solid church while away at college. Your work as home-pastor to your kids is not yet finished. So, how does a Dad actually talk about theology with his kids? We offer two ideas to get you started.

Wait up when your teens are out at night. Watch a movie while you're waiting, but turn it off and throw a pizza in the oven when you hear the car in the driveway. Your daughter just might be hungry. Keep your lecture on the lateness of the hour until the next day when you're both rested. Let her talk. Don't interrupt! She may not say much of importance the first time she finds you pulling a pizza out of the oven at 1:30 a.m., but when she's troubled by something a teacher said at school, she'll remember that you listened to her without judgment.

Turn off your radio in the car. Your teen may stay plugged into his iPod, but if he sees you're doing nothing but driving, he may soon enough gather up the courage to ask you a few of those burning questions. Be ready to answer them! And if you get stumped, it's all right to say "I don't know; let's go ask Pastor." Your son may respect you the more for admitting you don't know everything. Even so, you are the primary go-to man for your family, even if you end up needing a little outside help for answers.

Frank Gillespie again:

"It's my experience that too many folks think that it is the pastor alone who should teach their kids. If that's the case, then by default, our children would be relegated to only one hour or so in Sunday School and a ten to twenty minute sermon during the Divine Service. By making theology a part of our daily conversations we make theology part of our daily walk in the faith."

Catechesis isn't just for confirmands, but an ongoing part of all of our lives. The more your teen knows about what the Christian faith is and isn't, the better insulated he will be against an increasingly hostile world. The more you know, the better able you'll be to answer her questions. We must not hesitate to give our children every weapon we can for the fight, and that means arming them with meaty theological knowledge. Frank tell us that he finds the more meat he feeds his Sunday School class, the hungrier they get for the good stuff and the less patience they have for milk.

"If our Christian education looks more like a daytime talk show than anything resembling church, why would they want to come back? There's no reason to get out of bed on a Sunday and go to church if you can catch the same material on Oprah or Dr. Phil five times during the week. However, if we teach [our teens] what the faith is chances are that they will come back because they will know where to find Christ and His Church. I believe that the exodus that we are seeing and lack of right teaching are joined to each other and if the latter issue is corrected, the former will be resolved."

We agree. It's that important, and dads are the ones to see the job gets done.



Blossom Where You Grow

Thoughts on Vocation from The Honorable
John Shimkus, United States House of
Representatives

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10.)

My undergraduate degree is from the United States Military Academy at West Point. While attending there I wrote a letter to Pastor Gil Busarow of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Collinsville, Illinois. I am unsure of the exact reason that led me to write him. Based on his response, which I remember well, I must have been searching for my lot in life. He told me to “blossom where I grow.”

That is what I have been trying to do ever since. After that letter, I graduated from West Point and served five years in the active military as an Infantry Officer. Three of those years were spent on an overseas tour in the former West Germany. My last year of service was with the 7th Infantry Division (Light) at beautiful Ft. Ord, California. There I met my future wife, Karen Muth, a called church organist and DCE at Bethlehem Lutheran Church.



U. S. House of Representatives

I left the active military to teach high school. God called me back to southwestern Illinois, where I taught government and history at Metro East Lutheran High School.

In 1990 I left teaching to run for a full time elected office in Madison County, Illinois. Winning as a Republican in a Democrat controlled county was unusual, but beating a 12-year incumbent was even more surprising. Our first son, David, was born in January of 1993, and Joshua followed in March of 1995.

After six years as county treasurer, I was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from the 20th District of Illinois. It was one of the closest races in the nation; I won by just over 1,200 votes out of over 240,000 cast. So in January of 1997, I started my new career as a Member of Congress, representing parts of 19 counties and over 650,000 people.

Life was a little easier when the kids were small. They were for the most part “packageable.” We took them everywhere. But as they grew older, along with a new brother Daniel, who arrived in October of 1999, bringing them with us became almost impossible. We used to joke that with two kids you were playing man-to-man defense, whereas with three kids you had to move to a zone defense. Unfortunately with an absentee father, Karen had to play a lot of zone defense on her own.

As stated earlier, my job is to represent over 650,000 people from Illinois in their nation’s capitol. This job has a couple of key elements to it.

First and foremost, I have to cast one vote for my district. I am always asked how I manage to do that for so many people who each hold their own views and opinions. My response is that having been born and raised in this district, my fundamental principles and values are the same as the great majority of people in my district. I am they, and they are I. This area of Illinois is culturally and fiscally conservative. We love our God, our country, and our way of life. We are for the most part pro-life and strongly support the right to keep and bear arms, which is found in the second amendment of our Constitution.



Sometimes an issue is not clear-cut based upon ideology. That is a good time to check back with my constituents for confirmation of an upcoming vote. Sometimes I ask, but most times they tell me their thoughts through calls, letters, and emails. A good member of Congress is on the clock 24/7 and is willing to take any comments at any time. Grocery store? No problem. Soccer fields? You bet. Between services over coffee at church? Of course. The outcry over the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout was deafening and helped me stand firm in the face of pressure from the White House and the leaders of both parties.

There are also those moral issues, the black and white issues upon which we as believers are called to stand firm. The protection of the unborn, the sanctity of marriage and other Biblical mandates are positions that I should be willing to lose an election over.

An unnoticed but critical part of my job is the role my office provides to thousands of citizens who have difficulty accessing the governmental services due them. My highly professional staff addresses a wide range of issues. Most casework falls in the following areas: Internal Revenue Service, Veterans Affairs, Social Security, Medicare, and Immigration. Many of the cases are opened during one of my many visits throughout the 30 counties in the new 19th Congressional District that I now represent. I feel we follow Christ's command for "doing for the least of these my brothers" when we are able to help.

But as with everything, it is the personal witness to those around us for which we will be held accountable. Have we led a Christ-like life and let our light shine, or have we placed a millstone around another's neck?

My family lives in Collinsville, Illinois, not Washington. There my wife remains busy teaching violin at two Lutheran schools and playing the organ for many others. My boys do music and sports while hopefully getting above average grades.

There are multiple opportunities to falter and fail in one's witness in Washington, D.C. Long hours, separation from family, power, and positions are recipes for the Devil, the world, and our own flesh to win out. But thanks be to God

who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. By God's grace through daily fellowship, not only can Satan and his plans be subverted, but a strong witness can spring forth. I am fortunate to live in a townhouse with other Members of Congress. In this arrangement we informally hold each other accountable. We also share with each other the trials and tribulations of our chosen profession.

Of course, the best testimony would be given from those who are around me the most. What would they say? They would definitely be able to point out my shortcomings and failures! I pray that they can also see the light of Christ that shines in me. For it is not the wars that we win, the budgets that we balance or break, or the monuments to man that we create that is eternal. What is lasting is God's grace freely given and freely received.

To that end it is my prayer that I too, when welcomed into heaven hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant -- enter." Until that time I will work hard to blossom where I grow.



From the Editor

My Life as a Layman

Rev. Frederic W. Baue, Ph.D



How times have changed. When I was an undergraduate at Florida State University back in the early 1970s, the Seminoles were notable for being the worst football team in the country. The only other team that was even close in terms of incompetence was the University of Miami. We didn't look bad compared to them.

Then FSU got a new coach, and so did Miami, and wow did everything change in a big hurry. It got so the whole football world held its collective breath when FSU and Miami met. That was real competition, not like the measly Univ. of Florida Gators we'd annually kick up one side of the field and down the other.

Now FSU and Miami have sunk back into mediocrity, and the \$#%^!! Gators are a national powerhouse. How times have changed.

“The trouble with things today,” someone once said, “is that the future ain't what it used to be.” Things are changing so rapidly you never know what's coming next. Back in the Seventies all the Christians I knew were reading a book by Hal Lindsay called *The Late, Great Planet Earth*. It explained in exciting detail how the Second Coming of Christ was going to occur any day now, with Gog and Magog (the Soviet Union) arising in the North and attacking the Holy City (the State of Israel, established in 1948 in fulfillment of biblical prophecy), triggering the Battle of Armageddon, the appearance of the Antichrist, and the Rapture, (which was somewhere between the first second coming and the second second coming). This was all pretty confusing. But then one night I was watching Pat Robertson's *700 Club* and he got out this chart that made it all clear. Egypt had just attacked

Israel (for the umpteenth time) and this was THE event that would trigger the chain of events that would usher in the Millenium. “The end of the world is coming in two weeks,” he exclaimed at the conclusion of the broadcast, “so send money now!”

I flipped off the channel.

Today the Soviet Union, that old standby for Gog and Magog, is no more. Israel is patently a secular state. Hal Lindsay got married and divorced two or three times and was discredited, along with Jimmy Swaggart and other televangelists. And none of their predictions came to pass.

New false teacher have arisen, like Tim LaHaye and his *Left Behind* series of books, who have misled many with their fantasies about the Rapture. But it’s the same old Chiliasm, or Millennialism, that has been around since the Jews made it up out of whole cloth back in the Middle Ages.

Dear Brothers of John the Steadfast, don’t listen to them. Don’t buy their books. And don’t send them any money!

All you need to know about Eschatology is right there in the Creed: “Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe . . . in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. Amen.”



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